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SUBJECT: DEATH OF EUFOR SOLDIER IN SUDAN: FRENCH
PRESIDENCY VIEWS

REF: KHARTOUM 351

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt, 1.4. (b/d).

¶1. (C) Romain Serman, AF-advisor at the French Presidency, briefed acting AF-watcher and UK Embassy Paris AF-watcher Lucy Joyce on March 10 concerning Chad/Sudan/EUFOR. Septels will report other parts of the briefing. Serman provided a detailed account of the death of the EUFOR soldier in Sudan (reftel) wholly at odds with media and Sudanese depictions of the incident.

¶2. (C) Basing his comments on the debriefing of the French soldier who was with Sgt Gilles Polin (the soldier killed in the incident), Serman said that there were four EUFOR jeeps patrolling on the Chad side of the border. Three of them were north of a geographic obstacle. Polin's vehicle was to the south of the obstacle. He wanted to join up with the other three and instead of going north on the western side of the obstacle, he went around the obstacle to the east before heading north. He thus crossed the border (unknowingly) into Sudanese territory. Polin and the other soldier then encountered a Sudanese military outpost.

¶3. (C) Serman said that Polin and the other soldier immediately raised their hands and said "French soldiers with EUFOR." (NOTE: Serman did not say whether they said this in French or English. END NOTE.) The Sudanese opened fire (which is perhaps why the GOF stated that they used excessive force). According to the soldier who survived the incident, Polin was seriously hit immediately and collapsed. The other soldier was lightly wounded and ran westward. Serman said that the wounded soldier commandeered a horse and rode the horse to safety to the Chad side of the border, where he made contact with the three other EUFOR jeeps. The three jeeps then returned to the area of the skirmish, hoping to rescue Polin and recover the fourth jeep.

¶4. (C) Serman said that when the three jeeps arrived in the area, the Sudanese fired mortars at them, bracketing the vehicles with mortar shells landing in front of, behind, and to the left and right sides, of the vehicles. They were unable to proceed and headed back to the Chad side of the border.

¶5. (C) Serman said that Sgt Polin, according to the other soldier with him, was killed instantly. Serman indicated that everything else the Sudanese have been saying about the incident -- that Sgt Polin was only wounded, that he was found by nomads who tried to help him, that later four of these nomads were killed when one of his grenades exploded -- was false. The Sudanese took several days in responding to French and EUFOR requests to cooperate in terms of locating and returning Sgt Polin's corpse and providing other details

about the incident. Serman noted the Sudanese claim for compensation for the four nomads allegedly killed in the grenade explosion, and added that the Sudanese had even demanded compensation for a camel supposedly killed at some point during the episode.

¶6. (C) COMMENT: If Serman's account is true, then this would more than adequately explain the strongly worded French condemnation of the incident reported reftel. It is not clear that EUFOR, in making its own statement at variance with the French statement, was privy to the information on the incident the GOF received from the surviving soldier. EUFOR may also have wanted to downplay the incident so as to avoid making other EUFOR participants nervous about the hazards of deploying along the Chad-Sudan border. END COMMENT.

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